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FAIR MODERN PORTIAS.

Not Yet On the Bench But at the

Bar.

A Group of Women Lawyers Who Have

Many Clients—These Bright Eyes

Ought to Succeed—Women's

Legal Talent.

COPYRIGHT 1900.

Boston has a woman's club of a sort

which perhaps cannot be duplicated,

even in this era of women's clubs, in

any city of the world. Its members are

the women lawyers and students of

the law. This legal fraternity or perhaps

I had best say sorority, meets on Sat-

urday afternoons in a private dining room

of a downtown hotel, where it eats a good

dinner and discusses many things besides

Blackstone. Indeed, if the testimony of

occasionally invited outsiders, whose ma-

son saint is not the fair Portia, it is to be

admitted, these lights of the bar have

about as charming a series of gatherings

as can be boasted by any society in the

modern Athens.

In Italy there was, they say, in the Mid-

dle ages, a woman professor, of law who

was so beautiful that when she lectured

they placed a screen in front of her, so

that the students might not see her face and

plunge for love of her. No modern woman

would be kept out of court by the

fear of such susceptibility on the part of

the jury, but in the minds of many it

must be confessed that the calling and

election of the woman lawyer are not as

clear as the woman's medicine. Never-

theless the success achieved by most of

the women who have entered the profes-

sion proves that they have a place in it,

and, in the West especially, the woman's

law is becoming the essential importance

in all the varied movements in which her

sex is engaged.

London has a woman conveyancer who

is said to be a good business and to give

satisfaction to her clients. In France a

leading lawyer has been awarded to Miss

Chauvin. In Russia there are professors

of the St. Petersburg faculty who lecture

on law before the women's courses, though

women are forbidden by the Government

to engage in legal practice. This country

is the only one which has any appreciable

number of women lawyers.

It is only twenty years since the first

woman made an attempt to gain admis-

sion to the bar, but the number of women

lawyers has increased so rapidly that

at the Women's Congress in Wash-

ington last year a Woman's International

Bar Association was formed. The pur-

pose set forth in its constitution are to

open law schools to women, to remove

disabilities of admission to the bar and the

bench, to spread information as to the

woman's legal rights and to better her

legal condition. The first Board of Officers

elected was as follows: President, Cath-

erine V. Waite, of Chicago; General Sec-

retary, Ada M. Bittenbender, of Lincoln,

Neb.; Treasurer, J. Ellen Foster, of Iowa;

Secretary for the United States, Lella J.

Robinson, of Boston, Mass., with secre-

taries for the foreign countries repre-

sented by legal delegates.

There are representative women lawyers,

though the most famous practicing woman

in the country is her friend, Belva Lock-

wood, whose campaign for the Presi-

dency on the platform of the Equal Rights

Party afforded us so much innocent

amusement in 1874, and again last fall.

Mrs. Lockwood has gone to Europe this

summer as a co-delegate with a woman

preacher, the Rev. Annanda Doyle, to the

International Peace Convention, but this

is no reason why I should not say behind

her back that she is a very clever woman

who will never let her bread drop butter

sides down.

Belva Lockwood was a practitioner in

several of the lower courts of the District

of Columbia, but was defeated in her

attempts to secure the Supreme Court until she

secured the passage of an act of Congress in

1870 preventing the exclusion of women.

She graduated from the National Univer-

sity Law School and edited for some years

the Legal News, published in Chicago. She

has been counsel for the defense in

numbers of murder trials and has been

clients who are applicants for places on the

pension rolls. She is not an exceptionally

clever lawyer, in spite of these achieve-

ments, having small gifts of logic and power

of consecutive thought, but is rather a

woman of strong personality, much ex-

ecutive ability, and talent for getting

things done. She has a genius for

advertising, and is quite aware that to

address 17,000 people in a month at fair

grounds, Grand Army encampments,

conventions and the like, to be se-

lected from grand stands by torchlight

processions and bands of music will make

her practice grow.

Something more than fifty years old, is

personally popular, and has a fetching way

in conversation. Her hair is gray, her

man mobile and her face expressive.

The woman doctor was born on the At-

lantic seaboard and migrated toward the

Pacific coast in a private schooner, but

the woman lawyer is a true product of the

Western soil. In June, 1869, Abigail A.

Mansfield applied to the Iowa bar at

Mount Pleasant for examination for ad-

mission as an attorney, and was received

without hesitation. A year earlier Phoebe

Cousins, since famous as a United States

Marshal, had secured her admission to the

Washington University Law School, St.

Louis, and two months later Mrs. Myra

Handwell, of Chicago, engaged in the

first contest for the admission of a woman

to the bar. Mrs. Handwell's name was

brought before the Supreme Court of

Illinois, one of whose members were in

sympathy with her cause. The politi-

cian against her was that being a mar-

ried woman and hence incompetent, she

could not be admitted. Mrs. Handwell

pleaded her own cause in a brief and

able manner and the court shifted its ground

to general disability on the score of sex.

Finally, the case went to the United

States Supreme Court where Senator Mark

Carpenter appeared for her. The decision

was adverse, though Chief Justice Chase

dissented from the liberal opinion.

Other of the earlier women lawyers were

Ada H. Kely, of Effingham, Ill., who

graduated at the Union College of

law in 1870 and was admitted to the

bar at her home without opposition, and

Mrs. Ellen Foster, who was admitted to

the bar in Iowa in 1872, and who was during

the last campaign the most prominent

publican in the country in petticoats, be-

ing chairman of the Woman's National

Republican Committee. Mrs. Foster went

into a legal as well as domestic partner-

ship with her husband, the firm name on

the shingle being Foster & Foster. For

years she has been distinguished as a tem-

perament advocate. Nearly all her work

for the Woman's Christian Temperance

Union has been of a legal character. When

that organization held its convention in

New York last fall, Mrs. Foster tried her

strength against Miss Willard's on the

prohibition issue and was defeated. She

calls the "drunk party." "Prohibitionists,"

Mrs. Foster is 60 years old and has a fine

face, with blue-gray eyes and a somewhat

languid expression.

Women of the law have tested their

powers in other fields than that of domes-

tic economy. Mrs. Waite, the first president

of the Woman's Bar Association, won her

prominence by publishing the Chicago

Law Times, an able quarterly. She did

not graduate from the Union College of

Law until 1868, but had been a student of

law and familiar with law practice for

many years previous, through association

with her husband, a prominent lawyer.

Mrs. Ada M. Bittenbender, of Kansas, is

better known as Superintendent of Legis-

lation and Petition in the National Woman's

Christian Temperance Union than

as a lawyer.

in the court room.

Possibly the best known woman lawyer

east of the Alleghenies is Letitia J. Robin-

son, who has an office in Pemberton

Square, Boston, and who sets apart special

hours for women for free consultation.

Miss Robinson has written and published

a book called "Law Made Easy." She en-

tered the Boston University Law School

in the fall of 1878 and graduated in 1881,

making immediate application for admis-

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